

(10) **Patent No.:** US 9,263,753 B2
(45) **Date of Patent:** *Feb. 16, 2016

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC ***H01M 8/04276*** (2013.01); ***H01M 8/188***
(2013.01); ***H01M 8/20*** (2013.01); ***H01M***
10/4214 (2013.01); ***H01M 12/085*** (2013.01);
H01M 8/04238 (2013.01); ***Y02E 60/528***
(2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
None
See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,069,371	A *	1/1978	Zito	429/409
4,321,312	A *	3/1982	Fujii et al.	429/49

(Continued)

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

JP	61156641	7/1986
JP	02109275	4/1990

(Continued)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Office Action issued in related Chinese Patent Application Serial No. 200680003482.X, dated Feb. 12, 2010, 14 pages.

(Continued)

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 13/284,637, filed on Oct. 28, 2011, now Pat. No. 8,354,184, which is a continuation of application No. 11/342,476, filed on Jan. 30, 2006, now Pat. No. 8,048,555.

(60) Provisional application No. 60/648,156, filed on Jan. 28, 2005.

Primary Examiner — Melvin C Maves

Assistant Examiner — Michael Forrest

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Lathrop & Gage LLP

(51) **Int. Cl.**

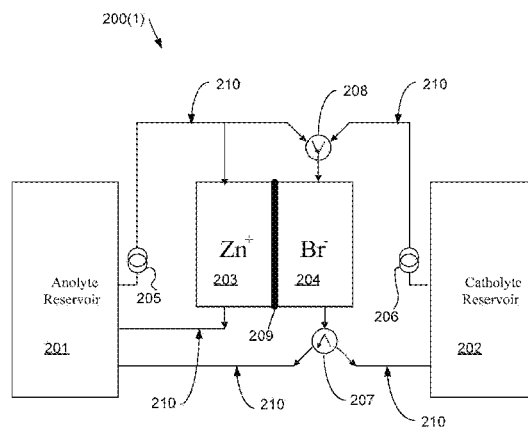
<i>H01M 6/00</i>	(2006.01)
<i>H01M 10/00</i>	(2006.01)
<i>H01M 4/36</i>	(2006.01)
<i>H01M 4/48</i>	(2010.01)
<i>H01M 6/20</i>	(2006.01)
<i>H01M 8/04</i>	(2006.01)
<i>H01M 8/18</i>	(2006.01)
<i>H01M 8/20</i>	(2006.01)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Flowing electrolyte batteries capable of being selectively neutralized chemically; processes of selectively neutralizing flowing electrolyte batteries chemically; and processes of selectively restoring the electrical potential of flowing electrolyte batteries are disclosed herein.

(Continued)

16 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets



- (51) **Int. Cl.**
H01M 10/42 (2006.01)
H01M 12/08 (2006.01)

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,663,251 A 5/1987 Sasaki et al.
6,355,373 B1 3/2002 Pauling
2001/0055713 A1* 12/2001 Eidler et al. 429/81

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

JP 03147278 6/1991
WO 2006081514 8/2006

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Office Action issued in related Chinese Application 200680003482.X dated Jun. 19, 2009, 17 pages.
Office Action issued in related Australian Application 2006207991 dated Jun. 11, 2009, 2 pages.
Response to Office Action issued in related European Application 06719813.5 dated Jun. 25, 2009, 20 pages.
Office Action issued in related European Application 06719813.5 dated Feb. 20, 2009, 3 pages.
Preliminary Amendment, Related Application Serial No. EP 06719813.5, Oct. 16, 2007.
International Preliminary Report on Patentability, Related Application Serial No. PCT/US2006/003124, Jul. 31, 2007.
Written Opinion, Related Application Serial No. PCT/US2006/003124, Sep. 25, 2006.
International Search Report, Related Application Serial No. PCT/US2006/003124, Sep. 25, 2006.
Abstract of JP 02065074; Toyota Motor Corp.; Mar. 5, 1990; 1 page.

Australian Patent Application No. 2010246505; Office Action of Aug. 23, 2011; 5 pages.
Chinese Patent Application No. 201010274765.6; English language translation of Office Action of Jun. 20, 2011; 9 pages.
Select File History from related U.S. Appl. No. 11/342,476, dated May 28, 2009 through Oct. 12, 2011, 141 pages.
Canadian Patent App. No. 2,596,087, Office Action issued Jan. 11, 2012.
Canadian Patent App. No. 2,596,087, Response to Office Action filed Jul. 11, 2012.
Canadian Patent App. No. 2,596,087, Office Action issued Aug. 2, 2012.
Canadian Patent App. No. 2,596,087, Response to Office Action filed Feb. 4, 2013.
Canadian Patent App. No. 2,596,087, Office Action issued Mar. 21, 2013.
European Patent App. No. 06 719 813.5, Office Action issued Jul. 10, 2012.
European Patent App. No. 06 719 813.5, Response to Office Action filed Nov. 16, 2012.
European Patent App. No. 11 155 016.6, Search Report of Apr. 5, 2011.
European Patent App. No. 11 155 016.6, Response to Search Report filed Nov. 8, 2011.
Japanese Patent App. No. 2007-553307, Office Action issued Jan. 27, 2012.
Japanese Patent App. No. 2007-553307, Office Action issued Aug. 3, 2012.
Patent Abstracts of Japan, vol. 015, No. 371 (E-1113), Sep. 18, 1991.
Patent Abstracts of Japan, vol. 014, No. 239 (E-930), May 21, 1990.
Patent Abstracts of Japan, vol. 014, No. 476 (E-991), Oct. 17, 1990.
European Patent Application 06719813.5 Office Action issued Nov. 13, 2014, 6 pages.

* cited by examiner

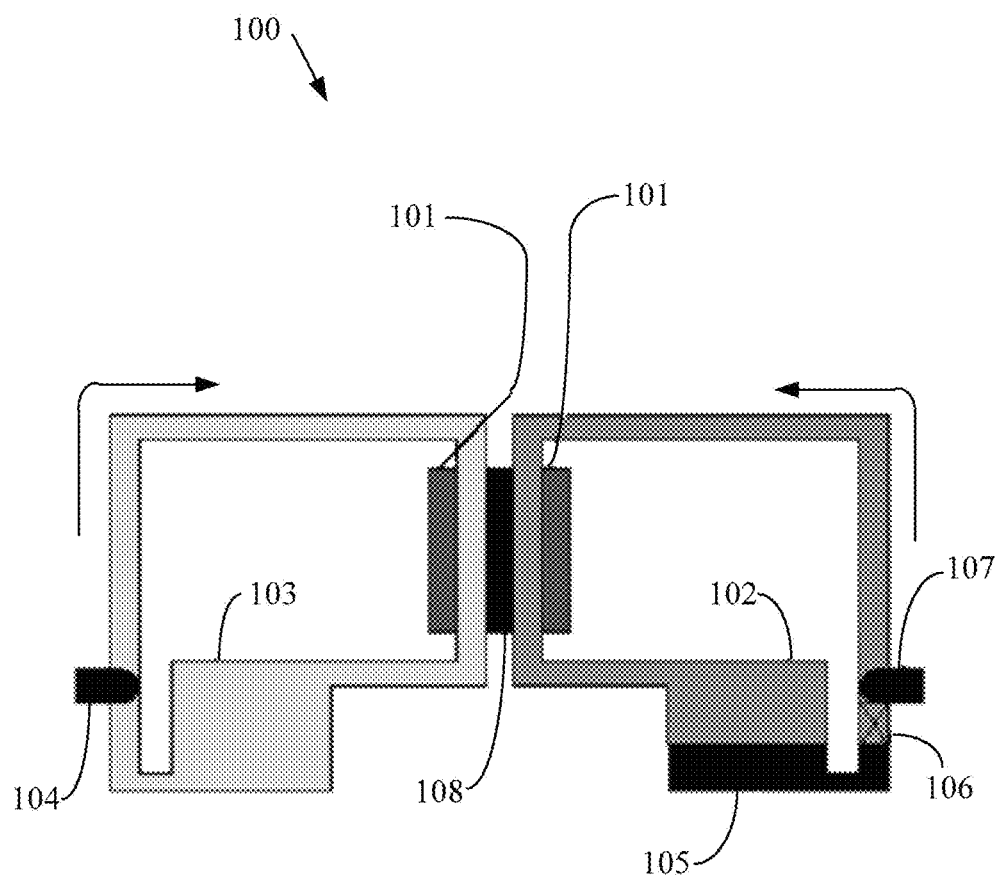


FIG. 1

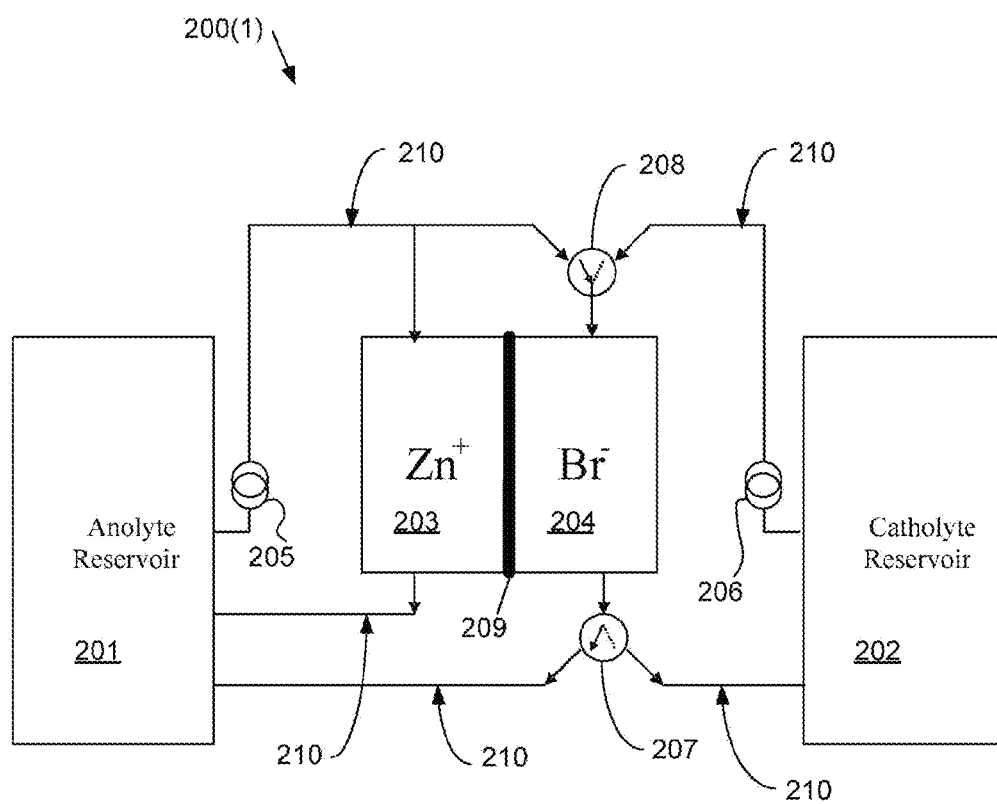


FIG. 2

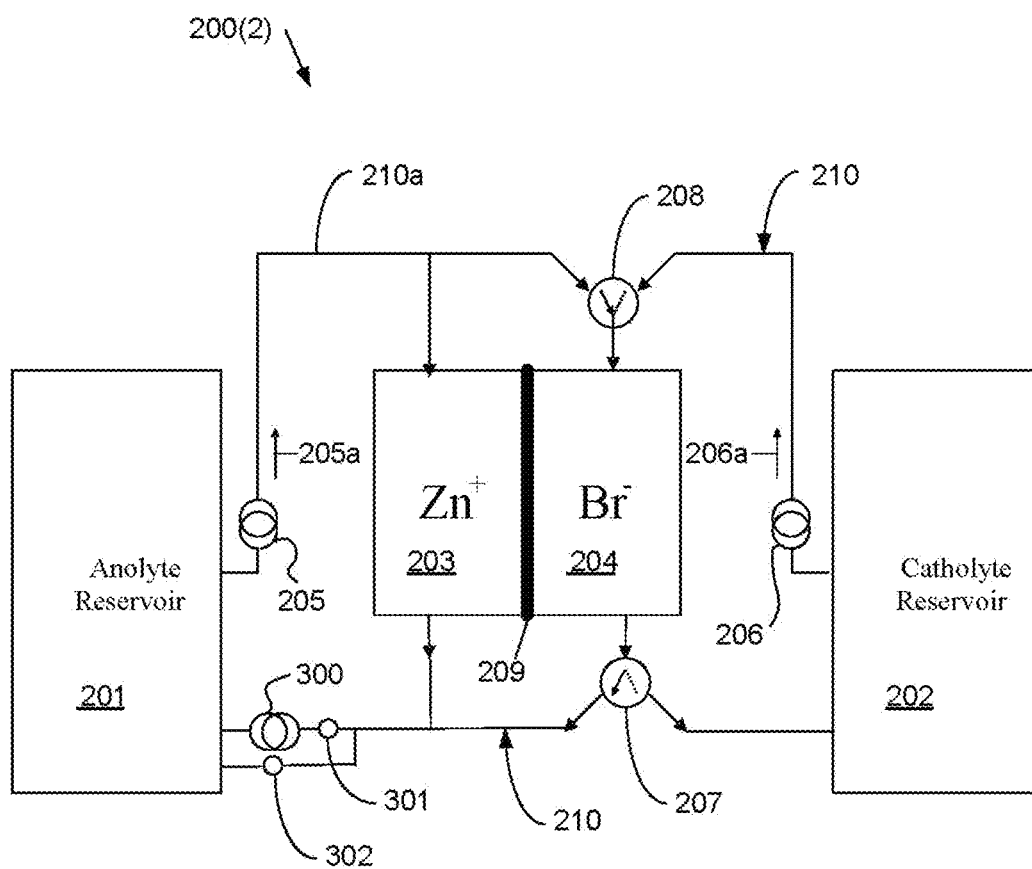


FIG. 3

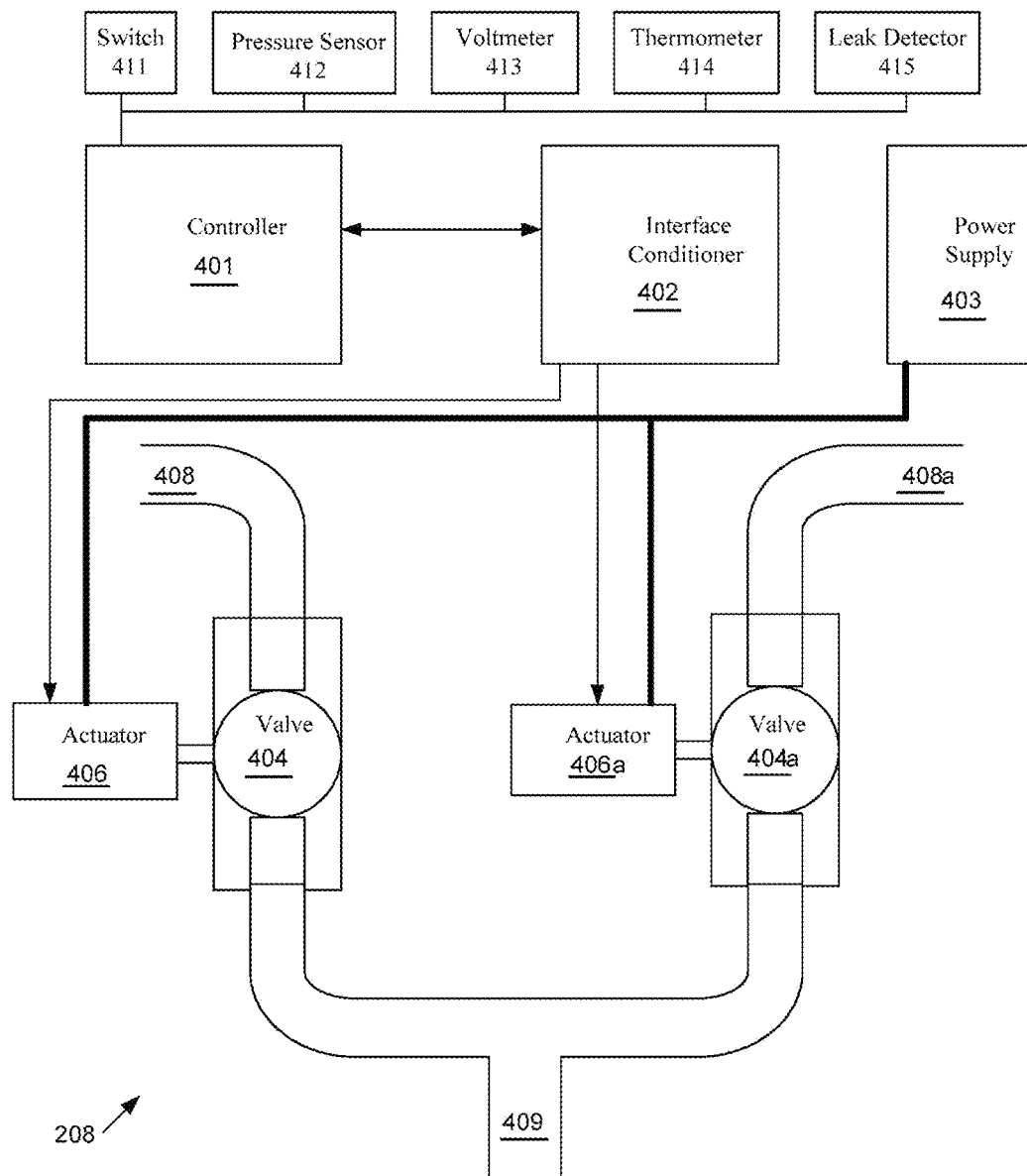


FIG. 4

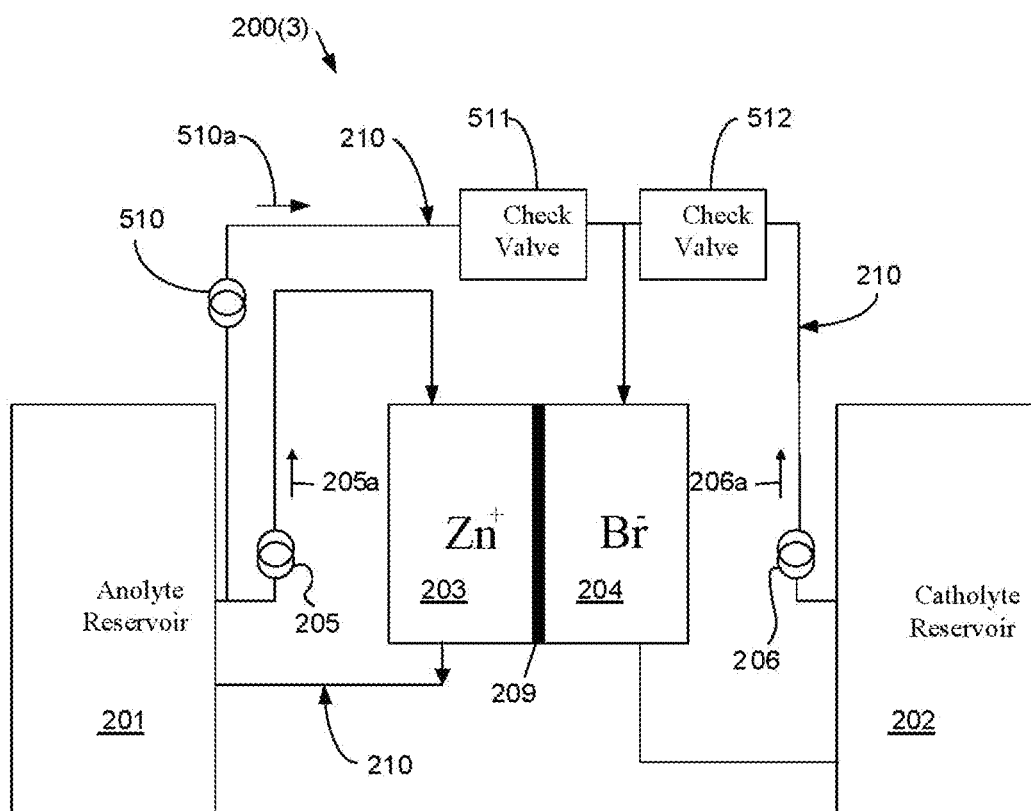


FIG. 5

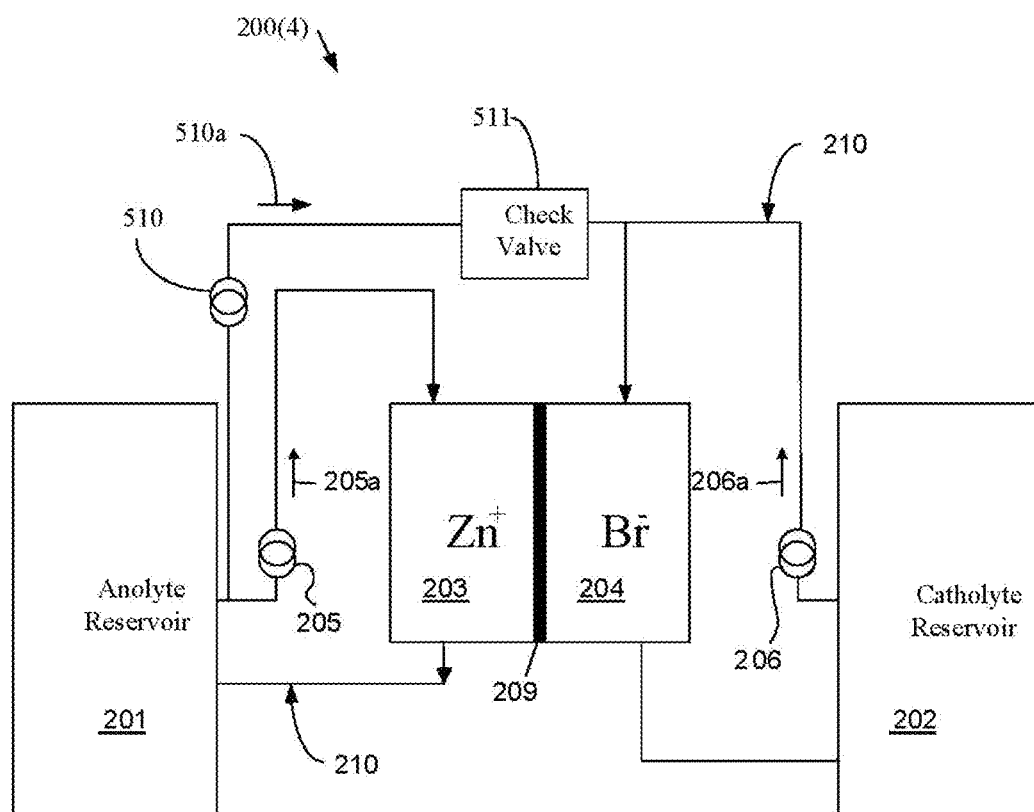
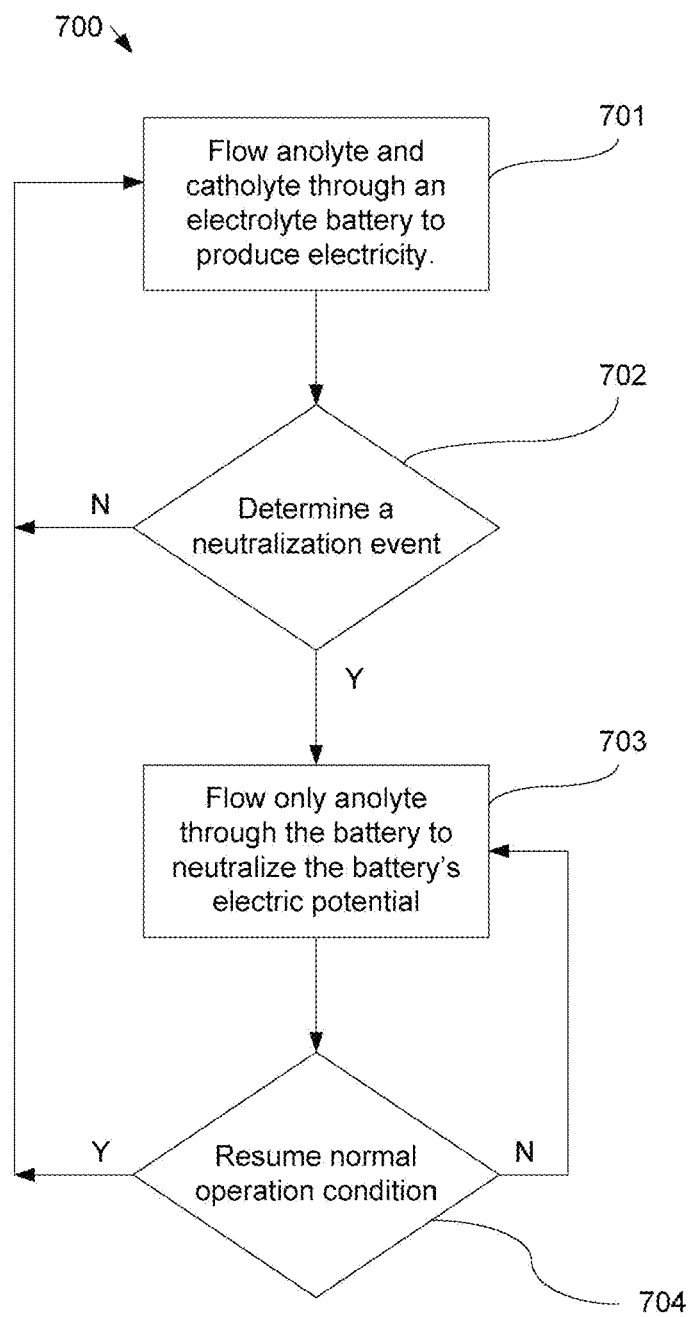


FIG. 6

**FIG. 7**

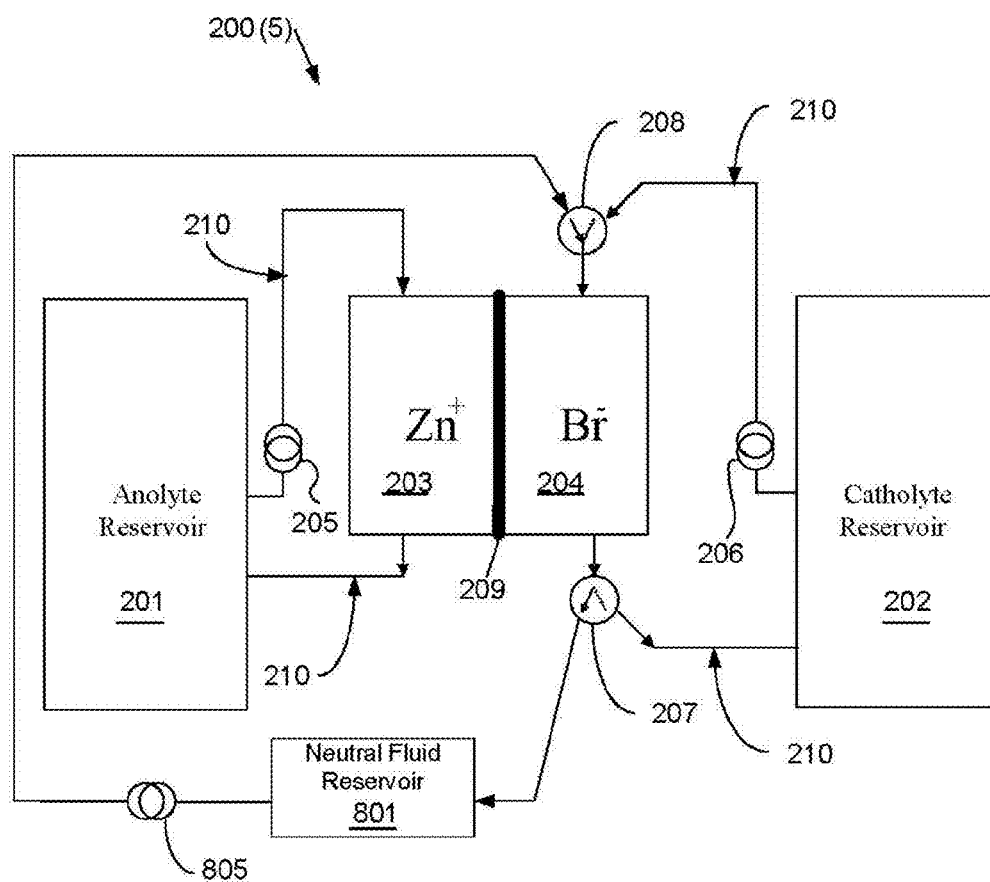


FIG. 8

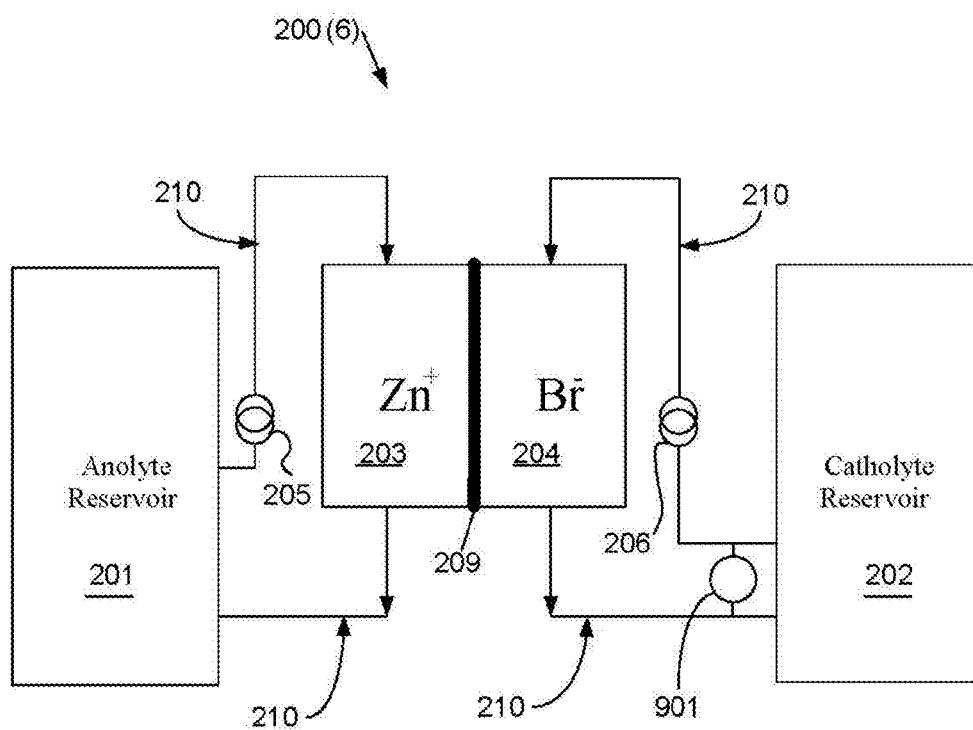


FIG. 9

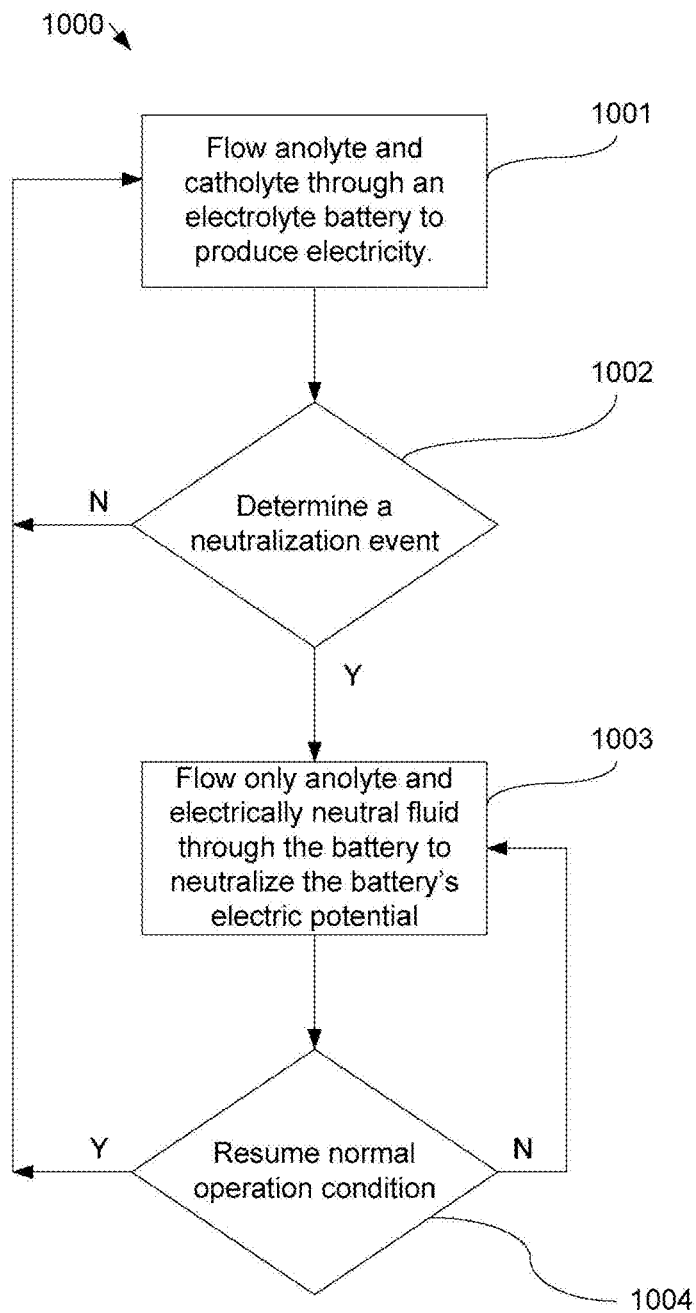


FIG. 10

FLOWING ELECTROLYTE BATTERY WITH ELECTRIC POTENTIAL NEUTRALIZATION

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/284,637, filed Oct. 28, 2011, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,354,184, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/342,476, filed Jan. 30, 2006, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,048,555, which claims benefit of priority to provisional U.S. Patent Application No. 60/648,156, filed Jan. 28, 2005. Each of the above-mentioned applications is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

Batteries are used for a wide variety of industrial applications. For example, buildings containing lead acid batteries are placed throughout our countryside and within our urban areas for electrical energy storage, and these batteries are used to keep telephones, cable TV, and Internet data centers functional when power is otherwise lost. The most widely used batteries for industrial applications are the classic lead acid battery, which are available as flooded cell or valve regulated. Each of these batteries uses the same basic chemistry; plates of lead and lead oxide are contained in an electrolyte of sulfuric acid. Battery terminals are connected to these plates immersed in electrolyte.

Flowing electrolyte batteries have two electrolytes, anolyte and catholyte, that are circulating and separated by a membrane. In the case of zinc bromine flowing electrolyte battery, zinc is plated out during charge and consequently frees up bromide ions that diffuse across the membrane. In this case, the anolyte becomes increasingly zinc depleted and the catholyte becomes increasingly bromine rich. An electrical potential develops across this membrane due to the presence of metal on one side of the membrane, such as zinc, and a catholyte on the other side of the membrane. The catholyte is rich in cation concentration such as bromide.

In the event of a fire within a facility containing industrial batteries, or in the event of a battery malfunction, the batteries may become unsafe and the energy that they store may become readily available to the outside world. Fire departments proceed with great caution into fires in such facilities because of the danger of electrical shock or explosion that may occur in the event of a battery failure. Previously, there has not been a way to turn batteries off chemically.

Also, in the event of non-use, a battery can self discharge due to reactant available in the reaction cell. The reactant causes a slow diffusion through the membrane to slowly discharge the battery. Previously, there has not been a way to neutralize batteries chemically to stop this self discharge in times of non-use.

SUMMARY

A battery in which electric potential is quickly neutralized chemically would increase safety in situations such as those described above and prevent self discharge in times of non-use. Accordingly, flowing electrolyte batteries capable of being selectively neutralized chemically and processes of selectively neutralizing a flowing electrolyte battery chemically are disclosed herein. A battery of one embodiment includes first and second electrodes separated by a membrane. One or more valves permit (1) flow of catholyte through the second electrode and anolyte through the first electrode such that the battery has electrical potential, or

alternately (2) flow of anolyte through both first and second electrodes such that the battery is chemically neutralized.

In an embodiment, a flowing electrolyte battery having an electric potential that is selectively neutralized chemically is provided. The battery includes first and second electrodes separated by a membrane, an anolyte reservoir for housing an anolyte, and a catholyte reservoir for housing a catholyte. A first pump selectively forces the anolyte from the anolyte reservoir through the first electrode, and a second pump selectively forces the catholyte from the catholyte reservoir through the second electrode. Means are included for selectively forcing only anolyte from the anolyte reservoir through the second electrode.

In an embodiment, a process of selectively neutralizing a flowing electrolyte battery chemically is provided. The method includes the steps of (1) flowing anolyte and catholyte through electrodes of the electrolyte battery to produce electricity; (2) determining a neutralization event; and (3) flowing only anolyte through the electrodes to neutralize the battery's electric potential.

In an embodiment, a process of selectively restoring electrical potential of a flowing electrolyte battery is provided. The method includes the steps of (1) determining whether the battery should have electrical potential; (2) inhibiting flow of anolyte through one of the battery's electrodes; and (3) flowing anolyte and catholyte through the battery to produce electric potential.

In an embodiment, a flowing electrolyte battery having an electric potential that is selectively neutralized chemically is provided. The battery includes first and second electrodes separated by a membrane. One or more valves permit (1) flow of catholyte through the second electrode and anolyte through the first electrode such that the battery has electrical potential, or alternately (2) flow of anolyte through both the first electrode and an electrically neutral fluid through the second electrode such that the battery is chemically neutralized.

In an embodiment, a flowing electrolyte battery having an electric potential that is selectively neutralized chemically is provided. The battery includes first and second electrodes separated by a membrane, an anolyte reservoir in communication with a first pump for housing anolyte and supplying the first pump with the anolyte, and a catholyte reservoir for housing catholyte and supplying the second pump with the catholyte. Piping is included for: connecting the anolyte reservoir to the first electrode such that the anolyte flows from the anolyte reservoir to the first electrode; connecting the first electrode to the anolyte reservoir such that the anolyte flows from the first electrode to the anolyte reservoir; connecting the catholyte reservoir to the second electrode such that the catholyte flows from the catholyte reservoir to the second electrode; and connecting the second electrode to the catholyte reservoir such that the catholyte flows from the second electrode to the catholyte reservoir. Means are included for selectively flowing the catholyte from the second electrode back to the second electrode without first entering the catholyte reservoir.

In an embodiment, a process of selectively neutralizing a flowing electrolyte battery chemically is provided. The method includes the steps of (1) flowing anolyte and catholyte through electrodes of the electrolyte battery to produce electricity; (2) determining a neutralization event; and (3) flowing only anolyte and electrically neutral fluid through the electrodes to neutralize the battery's electric potential.

In an embodiment, a process of selectively restoring electrical potential of a flowing electrolyte battery is provided. The method includes the steps of (1) determining whether the battery should have electrical potential; (2) inhibiting flow of

electrically neutral fluid through one of the battery's electrodes; and (3) flowing anolyte and catholyte through the battery to produce electric potential.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 schematically shows a prior art flowing electrolyte battery.

FIG. 2 schematically shows one flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization.

FIG. 3 schematically shows another flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization.

FIG. 4 schematically shows a valve according to an embodiment.

FIG. 5 schematically shows another flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization.

FIG. 6 schematically shows another flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization.

FIG. 7 is a flowchart illustrating a process of selectively neutralizing a flowing electrolyte battery chemically and subsequently restoring electric potential.

FIG. 8 schematically shows another flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization.

FIG. 9 schematically shows another flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization.

FIG. 10 is a flowchart illustrating another process of selectively neutralizing a flowing electrolyte battery chemically and subsequently restoring electric potential.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 shows a typical configuration for a flowing electrolyte battery 100. Battery 100 includes bipolar carbon electrodes 101 separated by a membrane 108 that is porous to cations, a catholyte tank 102, and an anolyte tank 103. A pump 104 circulates anolyte and a separate pump 107 circulates catholyte. A secondary catholyte 105 may also be included, which in the case of a zinc bromide flowing electrolyte battery 100 is a polybromide complex. A valve 106, e.g., a polybromide complex valve, allows pump 107 to pull polybromide complex 105 from a bottom of a tank during battery electrical discharge. Battery 100 provides potential energy across membrane 108 when catholyte and anolyte pass through electrodes 101 on respective sides of membrane 108.

FIG. 2 shows a flowing electrolyte battery 200(1) capable of being turned off chemically, to provide electric potential neutralization. Battery 200(1) may be a zinc bromine flowing electrolyte battery or another flow-type battery. An anolyte electrolyte reservoir 201 is in fluid communication with an anolyte pump 205, and a catholyte reservoir 202 is in fluid communication with a catholyte pump 206. With pump 205 operating, anolyte flows through a carbon electrode 203, which is separated from a catholyte electrode 204 by a membrane 209. With pump 206 operating, anolyte or catholyte flows through catholyte electrode 204, as now described. Piping 210 is appropriately arranged to connect the various elements, such as shown in FIG. 2, for example. Two valves 208, 207 are positioned to direct flow of catholyte or anolyte through catholyte electrode 204.

In normal operation, valve 208 only allows catholyte from catholyte reservoir 202 through catholyte electrode 204, and valve 207 only allows electrolyte passing through catholyte electrode 204 to enter catholyte reservoir 202. In a neutralized mode, however, valve 208 only allows anolyte from anolyte reservoir 201 through catholyte electrode 204, and valve 207 only allows electrolyte passing through catholyte electrode

204 to enter anolyte reservoir 201. Battery 200(1) is thus neutralized ("turned off") chemically when in the neutralized mode. Valves 207 and 208 are shown in the neutralized mode in FIG. 2. Valves 207 and 208 may be made up of individual valves connected together to act in concert; valves 207 and 208 may be check valves or another type of valve.

Provided that there is no break in piping 210 and pumps 205, 206 are functional, the electric potential of battery 200(1) returns when valves 207 and 208 are returned to the normal position (i.e., so that catholyte flows through electrode 204). In other words, the electrical potential of battery 200(1) may be brought to zero without removing the charge, and original electric potential may be restored with no appreciable loss of stored energy. This is notable because a battery is typically charged to a voltage and can only return to zero volts by fully discharging the battery's electric potential.

FIG. 3 shows a flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization 200(2) which includes an additional pump 300 and additional valves 301, 302 in parallel. Additional pump 300 may be used to drive electrolyte in a reverse direction (i.e., in a direction opposite arrows 205a, 206a shown in FIG. 3) through battery 200(2) in the event of a failure in a supply side 210a of piping 210. Normally, electrolyte may be pumped through pumps 205, 206 in the direction of arrows 205a, 206a, respectively. In the event battery 200(2) is put into a neutralized mode, however, valves 207, 208 are configured such that anolyte (e.g., a zinc depleted electrolyte) may be pumped through both electrode 203 and electrode 204 and returned to anolyte reservoir 201 as described above.

Normally, valve 301 may be closed, and valve 302 may be open to allow anolyte to flow from electrode 203 (and sometimes from electrode 204 as described above) to anolyte reservoir 201. If pump 300 is an impeller driven pump rather than a positive displacement pump, valves 301, 302 may not be used because such a pump 300 allows anolyte to flow through pump 300 to anolyte reservoir 201.

If piping 210a supplying electrolyte from pump 205, pump 205, or another relevant element fails, making it difficult to displace the fluid in the catholyte side 204 of battery 200(2), pump 300 may be activated. Upon activation of pump 300, valve 401 may be opened to allow anolyte to flow from anolyte reservoir 201, valve 302 may be closed to prevent electrolyte from flowing around pump 300, and valves 207 and 208 may be configured to allow anolyte from anolyte reservoir 201 to flow through electrode 204. As a result, electrolyte may flow backwards (i.e., in a way opposite the arrows shown in FIG. 3) through battery 200(2).

FIG. 4 shows an exemplary embodiment of valve 208. In this embodiment, valve 208 includes a controller 401, an interface conditioner 402, a power supply 403, first and second valves 404, 404a, and first and second valve actuators 406, 406a. Controller 401 may be, for example, a programmable logic array, a microcontroller or microprocessor, a switch, or a comparator having logic to look for an abnormal data signal (e.g., an abnormal pressure, voltage, or temperature data signal, or another signal indicating the presence of a leak); this abnormal data signal may thus trigger a neutralization event such as described hereinbelow. Controller 401 may be in data communication with a switch 411, a pressure sensor 412, a voltmeter 413, a thermometer 414, and/or a leak detector 415.

Interface conditioner 402 places controller 401 in data communication with first and second valve actuators 406, 406a, such as by supplying first and second valve actuators 406, 406a with appropriate voltage or current levels. Actuators 406, 406a communicate with valves 404, 404a, respect-

5

fully, to position valves **404**, **404a** in open or closed conditions in accordance with signals (e.g., particular voltages or currents) received from interface conditioner **402**. Valves **404**, **404a** may be ball valves or valves of another type, and when one valve **404**, **404a** is open, the other valve **404**, **404a** is closed. Power supply **403** may supply power to any or all of controller **401**, interface conditioner **402**, first valve actuator **406**, and second valve actuator **406a**, for example.

Valves **404**, **404a** and actuators **406**, **406a** may be standard piping parts capable of being purchased out of a catalog. An exemplary actuator **406**, **406a** is Asahi America Series 83 Actuator Electromni, and an exemplary valve **404**, **404a** is a Type 21 ball valve. Valves **404**, **404a** may include a non-reactive plastic such as PVDF in the case bromine zinc reactants are used.

In an exemplary method of use, controller **401** sends first and second valve actuators **406**, **406a** a “normal” signal via interface conditioner **402** to cause valve **404a** to be at an open configuration and valve **404** to be at a closed configuration. This allows the corresponding battery (e.g., battery **200(1)**, battery **200(2)**) to function in a normal mode of operation; catholyte from catholyte reservoir **202** and pipe **408a** thus flows through pipe **409** to electrode **204**. When controller **401** detects a neutralization event (e.g., switch **411** being turned off, abnormal pressure, voltage, temperature, or another indication of a leak), controller **401** sends a “neutralize” signal via interface conditioner **402** to cause valve **404a** to be at a closed configuration and valve **404** to be at an open configuration. This allows battery **200(1)**, **200(2)** to be turned off chemically as discussed above; anolyte from anolyte reservoir **201** and pipe **408** thus flows out of pipe **409** to electrode **204**. If controller **401** later sends another “normal” signal to cause valve **404a** to be at the open configuration and valve **404** to be at the closed configuration, the electric potential of the battery is restored; that is, catholyte from catholyte reservoir **202** and pipe **408a** again flows through pipe **409** to electrode **204**.

Switch **411** may be turned off, for example, to prevent self discharge of battery **200(1)**, **200(2)** in times of non-use. When battery **200(1)**, **200(2)** is neutralized as discussed above, this self discharge is stopped because the reactants are removed and stored safely away from the reaction site. However, if switch **411** is turned off for this reason, the time required for restoring the electric potential of battery **200(1)**, **200(2)** may be unacceptable if battery **200(1)**, **200(2)** is being used as an uninterruptible (back-up) power supply. In this case, it may be desirable to neutralize only some batteries **200(1)**, **200(2)** and maintain the electric potential of other batteries **200(1)**, **200(2)** so that the available electric potential is able to temporarily carry the required load and power pumps **205**, **206** to restore the electric potential of neutralized batteries **200(1)**, **200(2)**.

FIG. 5 shows an embodiment of a flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization **200(3)**; battery **200(3)** includes a pump **510** and first and second check valves **511**, **512** to selectively supply electrolyte from anolyte reservoir **201** to electrode **204**. Pump **510** is sized such that, when turned on, it forces check valve **511** open and check valve **512** closed. As shown, pump **510** only pumps electrolyte from anolyte reservoir **201** in direction **510a** to electrode **204**, and check valves **511**, **512** only permit fluid flow in one direction.

In an exemplary method of use, pump **510** is turned off under normal conditions. When pump **510** is turned off, pressure from pump **206** forces fluid through valve **512** and forces valve **511** closed. However, if pump **510** is energized, anolyte from anolyte reservoir **201** is forced through valve **511** and

6

electrode **204**, and valve **512** is forced closed. The electrical potential of battery **200(3)** is thus brought to zero without removing the charge.

As shown in FIG. 5, electrolyte from electrode **204** may enter catholyte reservoir **202** regardless of whether the electrolyte is anolyte or catholyte. Since this will be done for only a short period of time, there will be (at most) only a small amount of anolyte delivered to catholyte reservoir **202**. However, an overflow connector (not shown) may be included between the anolyte and catholyte reservoirs **201**, **202** to prevent a respective reservoir from becoming over-full. The bromide rich electrolyte will thus sink to the bottom of the reservoir, and the top layer will be compatible with the anolyte. Therefore, overflow from the top of the reservoir will not force the bromide rich electrolyte into anolyte reservoir **201**.

FIG. 6 shows an embodiment of a flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization **200(4)** that may function substantially as described above in reference to FIG. 5, though without check valve **512**. Although not shown, the embodiment described in FIG. 5 may also function without check valve **511** and check valve **512**. In removing valve **511** and/or valve **512**, piping and pumps **206**, **510** may be configured and sized such that there is no cross-flow; catholyte from reservoir **202** may be selectively forced through electrode **204**; and anolyte from reservoir **201** may be selectively forced through electrode **204**.

FIG. 7 shows a process **700** of selectively neutralizing a flowing electrolyte battery chemically and subsequently restoring its electric potential. In step **701**, anolyte and catholyte are flowed through an electrolyte battery to produce electricity. In an example of step **701**, pumps **205**, **206** pump anolyte and catholyte through electrodes **203**, **204**, as shown in FIG. 2. In step **702**, a neutralization condition is determined. In an example of step **702**, as discussed in reference to FIG. 4, controller **401** detects an event (e.g., switch **411** is turned off by a user) and/or an abnormal condition (e.g., an abnormal pressure detected by pressure sensor **412**; an abnormal voltage detected by voltmeter **413**; an abnormal temperature detected by thermometer **414**; and/or an indication of a leak by leak detector **415**).

In step **703**, only anolyte is flowed through the battery to neutralize the battery’s electric potential. In an example of step **703**, valves **207**, **208** and pump **205** cooperate to introduce only anolyte through electrodes **203**, **204**, as shown in FIG. 2. If valve **208** is substantially as described in reference to FIG. 4, controller **401** sends a “neutralize” signal via interface conditioner **402** to cause valve **404a** to be at a closed configuration and valve **404** to be at an open configuration. Additional examples are discussed above in reference to FIGS. 5 and 6, such as where pump **510** flows anolyte through electrodes **203**, **204**.

In step **704**, a resume normal operation condition is determined in which electric potential is desired. In an example of step **704**, controller **401** detects an event (e.g., switch **411** is turned on by a user) and/or a normalized condition is detected (e.g., a normal pressure detected by pressure sensor **412**; a normal voltage detected by voltmeter **413**; a normal temperature detected by thermometer **414**; or another indication of normal conditions).

FIG. 8 shows an embodiment of a flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization **200(5)** that includes a neutral fluid reservoir **801** in fluid communication with a pump **805** and valves **207**, **208**. An electrically neutral fluid (e.g., an electrolyte with reactant removed) may be contained in neutral fluid reservoir **801**. In the case of a zinc bromine

flowing electrolyte battery, an example of an electrically neutral fluid is electrolyte with bromine removed.

In normal operation, valve **208** only allows catholyte from catholyte reservoir **202** through catholyte electrode **204**, and valve **207** only allows electrolyte passing through catholyte electrode **204** to enter catholyte reservoir **202**. In a neutralized mode, however, valve **208** only allows neutral fluid from neutral fluid reservoir **801** through catholyte electrode **204**, and valve **207** only allows electrolyte passing through catholyte electrode **204** to enter neutral fluid reservoir **801**. Battery **200(5)** is thus neutralized (“turned off”) chemically when in the neutralized mode. Valves **207** and **208** are shown in the neutralized mode in FIG. **8**.

Provided that there is no break in piping **210** and pumps **205**, **206** are functional, the electric potential of battery **200 (5)** returns when valves **207** and **208** are returned to the normal position (i.e., so that catholyte flows through electrode **204**). In other words, the electrical potential of battery **200(5)** may be brought to zero without removing the charge, and original electric potential may be restored with no appreciable loss of stored energy.

FIG. **9** shows an embodiment of a flowing electrolyte battery with electric potential neutralization **200(6)** that includes a valve **901** that selectively allows electrolyte flowing out of electrode **204** to re-enter electrode **204** without first returning to catholyte reservoir **202**. This allows reactants in the electrolyte to be used up (or to become “electrically neutral”) with no appreciable loss of energy, since the reactants are not replenished. In this way, electrode **204** and battery **200(6)** become electrically neutral in a short period of time without an appreciable loss of stored energy.

FIG. **10** shows a process **1000** of selectively neutralizing a flowing electrolyte battery chemically and subsequently restoring its electric potential. In step **1001**, anolyte and catholyte are flowed through an electrolyte battery to produce electricity. In an example of step **1001**, pumps **205**, **206** pump anolyte and catholyte through electrodes **203**, **204**, as shown in FIG. **8**. In step **1002**, a neutralization condition is determined. In an example of step **1002**, as discussed in reference to FIG. **4**, controller **401** detects an event (e.g., switch **411** is turned off by a user) and/or an abnormal condition (e.g., an abnormal pressure detected by pressure sensor **412**; an abnormal voltage detected by voltmeter **413**; an abnormal temperature detected by thermometer **414**; and/or an indication of a leak by leak detector **415**).

In step **1003**, only anolyte and an electrically neutral fluid is flowed through the battery to neutralize the battery’s electric potential. In an example of step **1003**, valves **207**, **208** and pump **805** cooperate to introduce only electrically neutral fluid through electrode **204**, as shown in FIG. **8**. An additional example is discussed above in reference to FIG. **9**, such as where valve **901** causes electrolyte flowing out of electrode **204** to re-enter electrode **204** without first returning to catholyte reservoir **202**.

In step **1004**, a resume normal operation condition is determined in which electric potential is desired. In an example of step **1004**, controller **401** detects an event (e.g., switch **411** is turned on by a user) and/or a normalized condition is detected (e.g., a normal pressure detected by pressure sensor **412**; a normal voltage detected by voltmeter **413**; a normal temperature detected by thermometer **414**; or another indication of normal conditions).

Those skilled in the art appreciate that variations from the specified embodiments disclosed above are contemplated herein and that any described test results are not limiting. The

description should not be restricted to the above embodiments or test results, but should be measured by the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of operating a flowing electrolyte battery, the battery including first and second electrodes separated by a membrane, a catholyte reservoir for housing catholyte, and an anolyte reservoir for housing anolyte, the method comprising the steps of:

flowing anolyte between the anolyte reservoir and the first electrode during both a normal and a neutralized operating mode;

in the normal operating mode, flowing catholyte between the catholyte reservoir and the second electrode;

detecting a neutralization event;

triggering the neutralized operating mode from the normal operating mode in response to the detected neutralization event; and

in the neutralized operating mode, flowing anolyte between the anolyte reservoir and the second electrode; wherein the neutralization event is selected from the group consisting of abnormal battery voltage, abnormal battery temperature, abnormal battery pressure, battery leakage, a period of non-use of the battery, and a fire in an environment of the battery.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of detecting is performed by one or more sensors in data communication with a controller.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the step of flowing catholyte between the catholyte reservoir and the second electrode comprises flowing catholyte between a first and a second flow valve.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the step of flowing anolyte between the anolyte reservoir and the second electrode comprises flowing anolyte between the first and second flow valves.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein flowing catholyte between the first and second flow valves comprises:

flowing catholyte through the first flow valve before flowing catholyte through the second electrode; and

flowing catholyte through the second electrode before flowing catholyte through the second flow valve.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein flowing anolyte between the first and second flow valves comprises:

flowing anolyte through the first flow valve before flowing anolyte through the second electrode; and

flowing anolyte through the second electrode before flowing anolyte through the second flow valve.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein:

the step flowing catholyte between the catholyte reservoir and the second electrode comprises flowing catholyte through the second electrode in a first direction; and

the step of flowing anolyte between the anolyte reservoir and the second electrode comprises flowing anolyte through the second electrode in a second direction, the second direction being opposite to the first direction.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the step of flowing anolyte between the anolyte reservoir and the first electrode comprises:

flowing anolyte through the first electrode in a third direction during the normal operating mode; and

flowing anolyte through the first electrode in a fourth direction during the neutralized operating mode, the fourth direction being opposite to the third direction.

9

9. The method of claim 1, wherein:

the step of flowing catholyte between the catholyte reservoir and the second electrode comprises flowing catholyte through a first check valve; and

the step of flowing anolyte between the anolyte reservoir and the second electrode comprises flowing anolyte through a second check valve.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of flowing anolyte between the anolyte reservoir and the second electrode comprises flowing anolyte through a check valve.

11. A method of operating a flowing electrolyte battery, the battery including first and second electrodes separated by a membrane, a catholyte reservoir for housing catholyte, an anolyte reservoir for housing anolyte, and a neutral fluid reservoir for housing an electrically neutral fluid, the method comprising the steps of:

flowing anolyte between the anolyte reservoir and the first electrode during both a normal and a neutralized operating mode;

in the normal operating mode, flowing catholyte between the catholyte reservoir and the second electrode;

detecting a neutralization event;

triggering the neutralized operating mode from the normal operating mode in response to the detected neutralization event; and

in the neutralized operating mode, flowing electrically neutral fluid between the neutral fluid reservoir and the second electrode;

wherein the neutralization event is selected from the group consisting of abnormal battery voltage, abnormal battery temperature, abnormal battery pressure, battery leakage, a period of non-use of the battery, and a fire in an environment of the battery.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of detecting is performed by one or more sensors in data communication with a controller.

10

13. A flowing electrolyte battery, comprising:

first and second electrodes separated by a membrane;

a catholyte reservoir for housing catholyte;

an anolyte reservoir for housing anolyte; and

first and second flow valves in fluid communication with the second electrode;

the battery including a normal operating mode and a neutralized operating mode;

wherein anolyte flows through the first electrode during both the normal and the neutralized operating modes;

wherein in the normal operating mode, the first and second flow valves allow catholyte to flow through the second electrode;

wherein in the neutralized operating mode, the first and second flow valves allow anolyte to flow through the second electrode to chemically neutralize the battery;

wherein anolyte flowing from the second electrode to the anolyte reservoir is structurally required to flow through the second flow valve before flowing through the first flow valve; and

wherein catholyte flowing from the second electrode to the catholyte reservoir is structurally required to flow through the second flow valve before flowing through the first flow valve.

14. The flowing electrolyte battery of claim 13, wherein the battery is configured to trigger the neutralized operating mode in response to a detected neutralization event.

15. The flowing electrolyte battery of claim 14, the detected neutralization event being selected from the group consisting of abnormal battery voltage, abnormal battery temperature, abnormal battery pressure, battery leakage, a period of non-use of the battery, and a fire in an environment of the battery.

16. The flowing electrolyte battery of claim 15, further comprising one or more sensors in data communication with a controller for detecting an abnormal condition representing the detected neutralization event.

* * * * *